

# The Sikh Martyrs of Western Punjab

KAPUR SINGH

The following speech was delivered Kapur Singh, M. P. at a meeting held at Ludhiana on 26<sup>th</sup> March to commemorate the martyrdom of thousands of Sikh men and women, who voluntarily and by choice, courted death than to abjure their faith, during the communal frenzy that preceded and accompanied the partition of India in 1947, in Western Punjab.

We are privileged to be present here to commemorate the martyrdoms of, which thousands of Sikhs courted in the Western Punjab, just 15 years ago, to proclaim and assert their eternal faith that the things of the spirit and that which intimately pertains to them, call not be bartered away or exchanged for any goods of this world what-so-ever. For the last 200 hundred years in the Sikh history and with the shining examples of Baha'i martyrs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rest of the world has not witnessed such a reassuring assertion of the supremacy of the spirit over body, for man centuries past. Indeed there have always been men and women who have proclaimed and suffered for their faith in the superiority of the things that are permanent over those that are transient. But courting death, where simple and clear choice is between religious faith and apostasy, has not been a common phenomenon in the past few centuries.

Seen thus, it would appear, that these martyrdoms, the number of which runs literally into thousands, constitute a most significant episode in the World History. That these, men, women, boys and girls were all Sikhs is a matter for just pride to our community. Although the import of these martyrdoms is universal, a matter of pride for the whole of humanity, yet, we the Sikhs are justified in being specially grateful to the God that He vouchsafed this supreme evidence of His Majesty and glory through the Sikhs of Pothohar, i.e. the Western Punjab.

There are two other reasons why this glorious episode in our history as well as that of mankind can claim our special gratitude. The kinsmen of these martyrs have migrated wholesale to the eastern Punjab and have settled amongst the native Sikh populations of these areas. The spiritual fervour and religious faith which they have brought with them after passing through the supreme test that only a choice between life and death can provide, has visibly acted as a great ferment of religious revival amongst the Sikhs of the eastern Punjab. One has only to compare the dynamic impulse that characterise collective Sikh life of the present day with the state of affairs that prevailed before 1947, to realise how vital this ferment has been. Almost all phases, of the civic life of the Sikhs have been illuminated and highlighted to a pitch unknown in the pre-partition days. Literally thousands of new *gurdwārās* have been constructed, old historical *gurdwārās* have been renovated, new schools and other educational institutions have been set up, new literary and journalistic activities have been inaugurated with the result that the collective Sikh life has been imbued with a new and impressive energy. This, in itself, is a gain, the measure of which is difficult to know at present.

The third and last blessing, which these martyrdoms have conferred upon the Sikh people is that thereby, they have been gathered together in an area which is compact and viable. In 1947, when the political powers were distributed on the basis of communal population, the Sikhs remained completely dis-inherited for the main reason that they were not concentrated densely enough in any viable compact area. This is no longer the case. Now, the Sikhs constitute almost a majority of the population of the Western Region of the present India-Punjab. This is

pregnant with historical potentialities.

For these three great blessings or far-reaching spiritual and historical import we are beholden to these thousands of souls of un-shakable faith and firm conviction, who maintained their spiritual integrity in the face of death itself, without flinching and without wavering, remaining unto their last movement on this earth, firm and adamant, This is the idea which we express in our congregational prayer by saying:

*Sikhi Sidaq kesā n̄ swā s̄ān nā l nibhi ā*

Let us, therefore, this day and now, remember the glorious deeds of these great souls and utter in unison, "Glory be to God."

***The Sikh Review, May 1962.***